

Remarks

Claims 8 to 14 are in this application.

The arrangement of the specification has been followed. Of note, there is no statute or rule that requires the use of headings. Accordingly, none have been used.

Claim 8 replaces claim 5 that had been rejected as being unpatentable over Arnold.

Claim 8 is directed to a system for processing drilling fluid during top-hole drilling. The system requires "a sealing device mounted on a template of said drilling hole . . . at least with one pump module spaced from and connected to said sealing device to effect a differential pressure therein for pumping drilling fluid. . . upwardly. . .".

The Examiner alleges that the sump 26 of Arnold acts as a sealing means connected to the well head. Issue is taken in this respect. Arnold specifically teaches that a B.O.P. stack is connected to a guide base and has hydraulic control lines 22 leading from a drilling station to a control plate. In addition, a drill string 24 extends downwardly into a borehole. The sump 26 is connected to the top of the well head 10 and has a bottom 28 with a mud inlet 30. The sump 26 also has an opening 38 to permit the access of the drill string 24 and a plurality of openings 40 to permit the free passage of water into and out of the sump.

Since the sump 26 is open at the top as well as the bottom, the sump 26 does not function as a sealing device to prevent leakage of drilling mud from the bore.

Further, note is made that the pump 62 of Arnold is mounted on the sump 26 and is not "mounted on the ocean bed" as required by claim 8.

In view of the above, a rejection of claim 8 as being unpatentable over Arnold is not warranted pursuant to the provisions of 35 USC 103.

Note is made of the Examiner's allegation that it would be obvious to eliminate the B.O.P. of Arnold in order to decrease the amount of equipment and cost. Issue is taken in this respect. The blowout preventor (B.O.P.) stack functions to avoid blowouts from a drill bore. Clearly, one of ordinary skill in the art would not seek to modify the structure of Arnold by eliminating the blowout preventor 20.

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Claims 9 to 11 depend from claim 8 and are believed to be allowable for similar reasons.

Method claim 12 replaces method claim 1 that had been rejected as being unpatentable over Arnold.

Claim 12 is directed to a method of processing drilling fluid during top-hole drilling before a BOP is installed and a riser connected between the BOP and the drilling vessel. Claim 12 specifically recites the steps of "mounting a sealing device. . . on a template of a drilling hole. . . ; pumping drilling fluid from the sealing device. . . to at least one of a treatment plan and a storage installation on a floating drilling vessel. In Arnold, the B.O.P. and drill string 24 are mounted in place prior to pumping dredge mud from the sump 26. There is no teaching in Arnold of removing drilling fluid from a drilling hole prior to mounting of a blow-out valve and a riser in place. Accordingly, claim 12 is believed to be allowable over Arnold pursuant to the provisions of 35 USC 103.

The advantage of applicant's claimed method are particularly set forth in the specification at page 3, lines 12 and following.

The remaining references have been reviewed. However, none is believed to be further pertinent to the claimed structure or method taken alone or in combination.

The application is believed to be in condition for allowance and such is respectfully requested.

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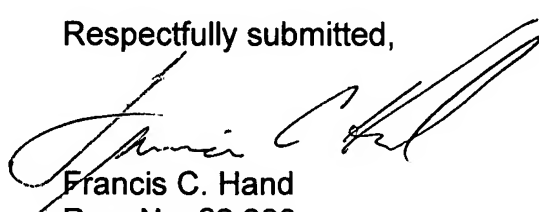
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